

JUAN GONZALEZ: FROM SEATTLE TO SOUTH CENTRAL

In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

September 18, 2000

The Trouble with AI

By David Moberg



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Letters

Selective Endorsement

Both Guy Saperstein ("An Environmental President," August 7) and Joel Bleifuss ("Face Reality," June 12) have thoughtful, persuasive arguments for supporting Al Gore. All of us have reason to fear a George W. Bush presidency. However, the biggest threat by far to the environment, workers and human rights, indigenous survival, and local and world democracy comes from global corporate abuse—euphemistically called world trade by those who profit from it. The fact that Al Gore does not question this, or even mention it as a problem, should be deeply disturbing to those of us concerned about these issues.

I suggest that progressives, including environmental organizations and labor unions, consider a selective endorsement. If you live in Massachusetts or Vermont, for example, a vote for Gore is indeed a waste. Bush doesn't stand a chance in those states, and Gore needs to hear that there is progressive opposition to his pro-corporate stance. In other states, like Texas and Indiana, Bush is so far ahead that a vote for Gore is also wasted. Voters in swing states like Michigan, Illinois, Ohio and Florida should probably vote for Gore to prevent Bush's election. Check the polls in October, and then vote your conscience.

Joel Hildebrandt
Berkeley, California

Environmental Precedent

Guy Saperstein's highly selective column praising Vice President Al Gore on environmental issues leaves out Gore's seven-and-a-half-year free ride for the subsidized oil, coal and nuclear industry; the holiday from higher fuel efficiency standards for auto manufacturers, whose average miles per gallon is down to 1980 levels; his absolute support for the anti-environmental, autocratic World Trade Organization and NAFTA; the ignoring of a solar-energy-efficiency campaign; and the knee-jerk support for risk-laden agricultural biotechnology—to name a few disjunctures between Gore's rhetoric and reality.

Saperstein concludes his desperate defense of Gore-bad (as contrasted with Bush-worst) by asking, "What are Nader's environmental accomplishments?" Let's see: Ralph Nader was an advocate against motor vehicle pollution in the '60s; a prime backer of the seminal federal air and water pollution laws and Environmental Protection Agency legislation in the early '70s; a chief architect of the Occupation Health and Safety Administration and its mission to reduce toxics in the work-

place; an early member of the anti-nuclear-power movement and pro-solar-energy initiatives; an author of books, articles and legislative testimony on a huge variety of environmental outrages; an initiator of litigation and mass rallies; and a builder of contemporary groups around the country committed to environmental lobbying.

To continue further elaborating the obvious would lead readers to think that Saperstein's information vacuum may be more than innocent ignorance.

Laura Jones
Deputy Press Secretary
Nader 2000

Guy Saperstein replies: *Laura Jones' accusation that I was "highly selective" in assessing Al Gore's environmental record is correct. I selected the most important environmental issues—clean air, clean water, global warming, etc.—and assessed Gore's record accordingly. Her list of issues is narrower and more selective, and her criticisms generally are directed more at President Clinton than Gore.*

For example, she criticizes Gore for decreased auto fuel efficiency standards. Every year, Congress has passed riders to major transportation bills prohibiting implementation of CAFE standards. Clinton signed these bills, but Gore lobbied against them. And as president, Gore has pledged to veto any bill with such a rider. If enforcement of fuel efficiency standards is your issue, Gore is your candidate.

Jones also claims accomplishments for Nader that were shared by many people, including Gore. The environment has always been a low priority for Nader; last year, only three of his syndicated weekly newspaper columns were devoted to the subject.

Most importantly, Jones fails to acknowledge what the Nader campaign is really all about. Nader is running to defeat Gore and elect Bush. When Nader was asked on Meet The Press whether it would bother him if his presence in the race elected Bush, he replied: "Not at all." On July 15, Nader told an audience at Creighton University that he would consider his candidacy "a success if Bush wins."

Nader supporters frequently voice the line, "We shouldn't vote for the lesser of two evils." In fact, what Nader is really trying to do is elect the person he considers the greater of two evils.

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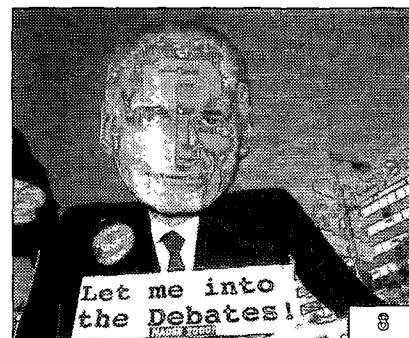
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Cover: Lee Wells

Say It Ain't So, Joe

By Salim Muwakkil

By choosing Joseph Lieberman as his running mate, Al Gore explicitly rejected the argument that the Democrats' future lies in energizing those currently in the political margins. Instead, the Gore forces are making overwrought appeals to swing voters who occupy the hallowed ground of the imaginary middle.

Some strategists argue that the way to win in November is to push bold policies that energize the apathetic majority. But the cautious tacticians managing Gore's run are loathe to wander too far from conventional wisdom. And the selection of Lieberman is conventional wisdom personified. The two-term Connecticut senator is the first Jewish candidate nominated for a major party ticket, and that's an admirable development. What makes him truly attractive to party leaders, however, is the way he publicly chastised President Clinton for the Monica Lewinsky embarrassment. His celebrated rebuke will serve to deflect Republican intimations that the Dems are spiritless socialists at heart, while shielding Gore from GOP charges that he deserves to share Clinton's shame. All the while, Gore can take the credit for courageously choosing a Jewish running mate.

Yet selecting Lieberman also is beating a dead horse. The Republicans clearly had decided that the impeachment episode was a political liability when they banished all politicians with any connection to that partisan lynch mob from the convention podium. By naming Lieberman, the Democrats lend credence to an angle of attack already abandoned by the GOP.

The sanctimonious Connecticut senator also is something of a culture warrior, who has joined forces with public scold William Bennett to launch rhetorical broadsides on the entertainment industry. Surely the pop culture industry deserves serious critique, and Lieberman's outrage sometimes echoes that of many progressives. But the tone of his indictments, and his choice of allies, encourages the kind of censorious attitudes common to right-wingers everywhere.

His divine name-dropping—Maureen Dowd wrote in the *New York Times* that Lieberman said God 13 times in 90 seconds during a speech in Nashville—may have been calculated to demonstrate that his Supreme Being was the very same deity that Christians hold near and dear. But it also furthered the fudging of secular and sacred that is becoming all too common in our public discourse. Shouldn't we be troubled by this trend? Separation of church and state is not just

an abstract notion; it's a necessary safeguard in a society that harbors a wide variety of belief systems. One of the most insistent lessons of history is how easily violent social divisions are fueled by religious antagonisms.

But most troubling is Lieberman's role, along with Clinton and Gore, in founding the Democratic Leadership Council. Created specifically to fashion New Democrats out of old (read: liberal) ones, the DLC has emerged as the party's vanguard. Their chief argument is that old Democrats were at odds with

the new realities of post-industrial America and tended to alienate coveted swing voters. The eight-year reign of their most celebrated alum might seem to validate that notion. Indeed, the economic boom together with declining crime, unemployment and teen-age pregnancy lend credence to the claims that New Democratic policies work.

But there is much in this country that is not working: an incarceration epidemic, an insane drug war, corporate domination, a growing economic divide, homelessness, child poverty, a health care crisis, environmental degradation, and so forth. Discussion of those issues was left to the "Shadow Conventions," organized in both

The voices of dissent are growing louder and more insistent. The choice of Joseph Lieberman will do little to still them.

Philadelphia and Los Angeles by conservative-turned-liberal columnist Arianna Huffington and religious leader Jim Wallis, among others. Thousands also protested in the streets of the two cities, demanding that those issues be addressed. Although the corporate media has paid scant attention to those voices of dissent, they are growing louder and more insistent. The choice of Lieberman as veep will do little to still them. ■



Prague Fall

Gearing up for the next IMF/World Bank protest

By Nick Rosen

Not so long ago, the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank might have gone unnoticed by the general public—just a bunch of champagne-drunk economists prattling on about arcane currency theories and deciding the financial fate of the developing world.

But that was before Seattle, when the anti-globalization movement was born among angry sea turtles and clouds of tear gas. The raucous events at the World Trade Organization meeting last November set off a wave of protests from Argentina to Taiwan to Washington. Now the IMF/World Bank annual meeting, set for September 21 to 28 in Prague, is being billed by some protest organizers as “the next Seattle.”

The Internet is buzzing with exhortations for mass protests in Prague, drawing the participation of a sprawling galaxy of groups, including labor unions, Zapatistas, Tibetan monks and Maori tribes. Several Eastern European organizations, including INPEG, a coalition of Earth First!ers and peaceful anarchists, and Central and Eastern European Bankwatch, a watchdog group against global usury, are spearheading the coalition.

The week will involve a number of events—including a “countersummit” on development policy, a cultural festival featuring dancers and performance artists, and workshops on nonviolence and consensus building—all building up to a “day of action” on September 26, when thousands of protesters will march in Prague and in satellite protests around the world.

While the collection of protest groups is numerous and motley, such prominent organizations as Friends of the Earth

International and debt relief advocates Jubilee 2000 are planning a strong showing. The Czech Interior Ministry estimates protesters will number from 20,000 to 25,000, but organizers are expecting as many as 50,000 people.

Numbers aside, Czech authorities and bank officials are bracing for the worst. They have pointed fingers at Web sites like DestroyIMF.org, sponsored by a Czech Trotskyist organization, which refers to the Seattle protests as a “passive, ideological showpiece” and vows to amass

out of Prague to concentrate on organizing in the United States.

Officials admit they don't know exactly what to expect. But they are allocating 5,000 military personnel to back up the 11,000 police on hand for the event. Czech police were trained by the Washington Police Department at IMF protests in April, and the FBI's newly opened legal attaché office in Prague, established for the purpose of “cooperative law enforcement efforts and information sharing,” will assist Czech officials, according to a Czech government spokeswoman.

The Czech Interior Ministry is closing all surrounding theaters to prevent any indoor organizing, and schools in the city have been given a long holiday that week to keep kids away from the protesters. Local McDonald's franchises and other multinationals are also beefing up security.

It is the protesters, not fast food joints or school kids, who will be in the most danger. This year's May Day demonstration in Prague was met by truncheons and kicks to the ribs, a police response later characterized by the Czech government's human rights commissioner as “inappropriately brutal.” (Although the demonstration was deemed illegal because of a late permit application, the participants were peaceful.)

Fear of a violent crackdown may limit the scope of the protests, says Soren Ambrose of the U.S.-based group 50 Years Is Enough, who attended a meeting of organizers in Prague in May. He adds that there is no plan to shut

down the meetings, as in Seattle. “Organizers feel that announcing such a radical goal would cause a harsh reaction,” Ambrose adds. “There is a history with the Czech police.”

Still, protesters may not be entirely unwelcome in Prague. Czech President Vaclav Havel, who has been known to make his own remarks against the global financial potentates, has invited protest leaders to meet with him in the Presidential Palace to voice their concerns. And the mayor of Prague has



A woman carries a puppet of World Bank President James Wolfensohn at the April 16 protests against the IMF.

thousands to descend on Prague and “smash the IMF and World Bank.”

Last spring World Bank President James Wolfensohn stirred the paranoia pot when he warned that he was “very afraid for Prague” and accused the Berkeley-based Ruckus Society of teaching people how to make Molotov cocktails and other violent protest tactics. Ruckus organizer Han Shan calls the remarks “beyond irresponsible” and says the group is committed to nonviolence. Ruckus, incidentally, is opting

GEORGE BRIDGES/AFP

even allocated the city's soccer stadium to provide low-cost accommodations for the protesters.

Adrian Lovett of Jubilee 2000 says that officials at the World Bank and IMF also have promised to highlight their issues and have made a welcome effort to establish lines of communication with advocacy groups. But, Lovett adds, "I still don't know if they are really listening to us."

"We're going to keep the pressure on," adds Jubilee 2000's Marlene Barrett, "so they'll have no choice but to listen." ■

The Highest Price

International opposition to Iraqi sanctions is growing

By Anthony Arnone

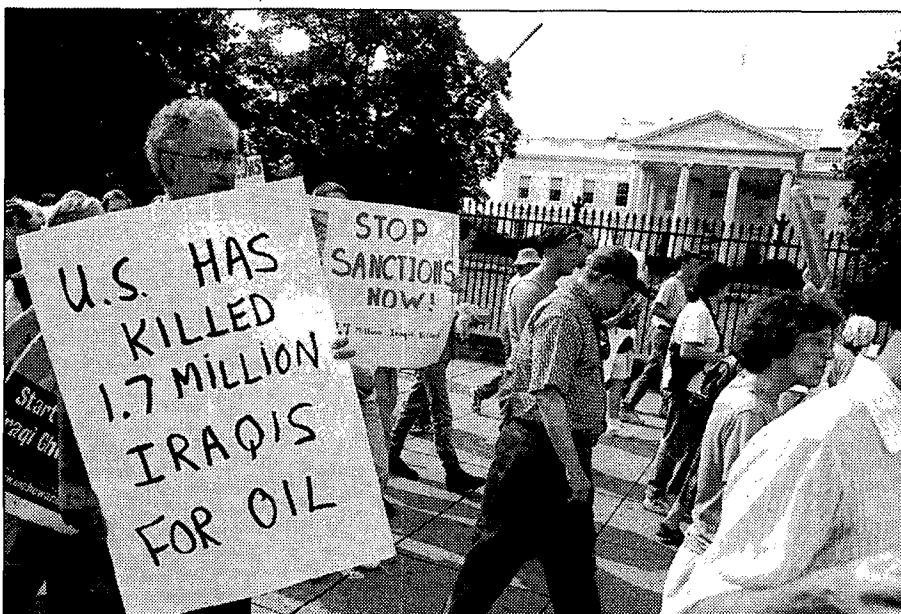
Ten years after the United Nations imposed an embargo on Iraq, a new U.N.-commissioned study has determined that the country has suffered "a humanitarian disaster comparable to the worst catastrophes of the past decades."

The report, written by Belgian law professor Marc Bossuyt, argues that the sanctions on Iraq are "ineffective" and "unequivocally illegal."

"The theory behind economic sanctions is that economic pressure on civilians will translate into pressure on the government for change," Bossuyt writes. "This theory is bankrupt both legally and practically."

Bossuyt's report is another indication that the Clinton administration is increasingly isolated on the international stage in its insistence that the sanctions continue, despite the devastating toll they are taking on ordinary Iraqis. In the London-based *Al-Hayat* newspaper, French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine called the sanctions "cruel, ineffective, and dangerous. They punish exclusively the Iraqi population and the weakest of them." Védrine added that the sanctions "don't touch the regime" of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

The United States has also come under increasing criticism for its ongoing bombing campaign against Iraq, which has claimed dozens of civilian



An August 6 protest marking the 10-year anniversary of U.N. sanctions brought more than 3,000 people to Washington, including Ralph Nader and Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio).

lives and further destroyed Iraq's infrastructure. Both France and Russia recently asserted that the bombings in the north and south of Iraq, over areas that the United States and Britain have established as "no-fly" zones, are illegal.

The U.N. sanctions have imposed a comprehensive embargo on Iraq, a country that had been closely integrated into the world economy and highly dependent on imports and oil exports. While Iraq has been permitted to sell oil on the world market since 1995 through an "oil-for-food" program, the U.N. sanctions committee, which is dominated by the United States, has prevented Iraq from importing items essential for reconstruction and humanitarian aid. Currently the committee has placed \$1.7 billion worth of contracts on hold, an amount that Benon Sevan, executive director of the U.N. Office of the Iraq Program, calls "excessive."

UNICEF estimates that 500,000 children under 5 have died as a result of the sanctions and lingering damage from the Gulf War. Millions more Iraqis lack access to safe drinking water, face hyperinflation and mass unemployment, and are dying from easily preventable diseases. "The sanctions policy has run out of momentum and the pain it has inflicted on Iraq's 22 million population has eroded support for it in the Arab world and

beyond," the *Financial Times* wrote in an August editorial. "Among the U.N. Security Council's five permanent members, only the United States and the United Kingdom remain staunch backers of the embargo."

In December, Security Council members France, Russia and China abstained from voting on Resolution 1284, which tied sanctions to a new weapons inspection program, leaving the United States and Britain as the only permanent members voting yes. None vetoed the resolution, however, with China eager to gain U.S. support for its entry into the World Trade Organization and Russia wanting U.S. approval for more loans from the International Monetary Fund. While France has been among the most vocal critics of increasing U.S. unilateralism—Védrine notably has called the United States a "hyperpower"—its government has not yet taken the step that it took in Iran a few years ago, when it openly defied U.S. sanctions to sign oil contracts with Tehran.

But signs that the embargo is crumbling continue to accumulate. On August 10, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez became the first head of state to visit Iraq since the Gulf War, defying the wishes of the United States. Chávez and Venezuelan Energy Minister Ali Rodríguez, the current head of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting

Countries (OPEC), made the trip in advance of a critical meeting of OPEC oil ministers in Caracas in late September. After his meeting with Hussein, Chávez flew to Indonesia, where President Abdurrahman Wahid also denounced the sanctions and pledged to visit Iraq in the near future.

Even Syria—a longtime rival of Iraq and backer of Iran during the Iran-Iraq War—has re-opened a passenger rail link with Iraq. The first train between the two countries since 1981 began its route on August 11.

While Britain has been the Clinton administration's key ally in maintaining the sanctions and the ongoing bombing of Iraq, officials there are also questioning the policy. In August, the Church of England issued a report critical of sanctions. And a parliamentary foreign affairs committee report recently argued that "sanctions cause significant suffering" and "only further concentrate power in the hands of the ruling elite."

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has begun to respond to criticism, particularly since the resignation of Hans von Sponeck this past spring. Von Sponeck is the second top U.N. humanitarian officer in Iraq to resign in protest of the sanctions, following Denis J. Halliday, who stepped down in 1998. Annan has acknowledged that sanctions are often a "blunt and even counter-productive instrument" of for-

eign policy. "It is usually the people who suffer," Annan stated, "not the political elite whose behavior triggered the sanctions in the first place."

Halliday, who has met with officials in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and the Netherlands this year, is encouraged by these signs. "I think a growing number of parliamentarians feel that the time has come to lift the economic sanctions on Iraq," he told *In These Times*.

The key to ending sanctions will be ongoing pressure at home and abroad. Demonstrations to mark the 10-year anniversary of sanctions have been held in London, Dublin, Rome, Paris and several other cities. At the August 6 demonstration in Washington, Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader voiced his opposition to the sanctions. "What is the purpose of this policy?" he asked. "Is it to demonstrate that the United States of America is the most powerful country in the world? I don't think that needs to be demonstrated of the graves on 1 million innocent Iraqi civilians."

Fortunately, more and more people around the world agree. From protesters to government officials, a growing chorus is questioning the price paid for U.S. empire. ■

Anthony Arrove is the editor of Iraq Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War (South End Press).

Union.com Organizing the New Economy at Verizon

By Dave Lindorff

PHILADELPHIA—The strike by some 87,000 Verizon workers—members of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers—represents one of those historic moments in modern labor history. In this case, it's a struggle between workers in a so-called "old-economy industry"—the regional telephone business—and a company that is trying through mergers and acquisitions to morph into a "new economy" multimedia conglomerate.

Created earlier this year by the \$72 billion merger of Bell Atlantic and GTE—two regional and largely unionized telephone companies—Verizon has quickly moved to expand globally with the creation of Verizon Wireless, a joint venture with Britain's Vodafone AirTouch, and the acquisition of Northpoint Communications, a major Internet provider. Verizon is currently the largest phone and wireless company in North America. The two striking unions represent the bulk of Verizon's core workers in 13 Eastern states. But there are many more Verizon employees,

Court Guts Vermont Campaign Finance Law

A federal judge threw out most of Vermont's strict campaign finance reform laws, saying some of the limits were unconstitutional. Although Judge William K. Sessions ruled on August 10 against mandatory spending limits for candidates and limits on contributions from political parties, he did uphold Vermont's low limit on contributions from individuals.

Vermont allows an individual to donate no more than \$400 to a statewide candidate and no more than \$200 to a candidate for the state House. "This is the lowest in the country," says Peter Sterling, outreach director for the Vermont Public Interest Research Group

VPIRG, along with several other nonprofit groups, has been battling the Republican Party, anti-choice groups and even the American Civil Liberties Union to maintain Vermont's groundbreaking campaign finance system, which was approved in 1997 and included a \$300,000 spending limit for gubernatorial challengers and \$265,000 for the incumbent (see "Cleaning Up," September 4).

Sterling says that while Sessions ruled against part of what VPIRG had fought for, he is pleased with the language of the ruling. Sessions hinted that the Supreme Court needs to re-examine the 1976 *Buckley v. Valeo*

case, which ruled that campaign spending limits hinder candidates' rights to free speech. In his ruling, Sessions wrote: "Given the wealth of evidence gathered by the Vermont Legislature ... this court understands why it included spending limits as part of its comprehensive campaign finance bill. Nevertheless, this court is bound to adhere to Supreme Court precedent."

"The cost of winning a seat is rising out of control," Sterling says. "The strong language is a good legal foundation for appeals to take on to the Supreme Court. We could not be more excited about that."

Elizabeth Brennan

particularly in the wireless and Internet businesses, who are nonunion. And Verizon is anxious to keep it that way.

The unions fear that with the ease of digital switching, the company can shift work such as directory assistance away from unionized regions to nonunion company offices, while expanding its investment in the nonunion wireless and Internet segments of its business. In the aftermath of the merger, Verizon announced that it would cut its unionized workforce by 6 percent. The company subsequently lowered this figure to 4 percent before the strike, but the striking unions want it reduced further to just half a percent—the size of the job loss when Bell Atlantic acquired NYNEX in 1997.

As *In These Times* went to press, the strike was entering its third week, and

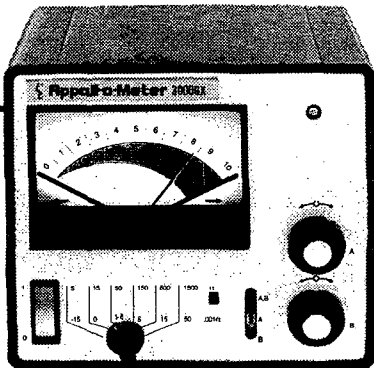
workers were about to start receiving their \$200 weekly strike pay. So far, the unions seem to have the upper hand. Verizon management was caught off-guard by the size of the walkout and the solidarity of the workers, who have been staging militant demonstrations and coming out to picket in sufficient numbers to effectively shut down some operations, such as the company's offices in Philadelphia, where managers were prevented from entering the building. Aggressive challenges to strikers, which have included managers allegedly hitting picketers with their vehicles, have only served to strengthen worker resolve and to rally more support.

The Verizon strike comes at an awkward time for the company, which had just begun a costly multimedia ad campaign featuring Bell Atlantic spokesman and actor James Earl Jones. The company, which is going ahead with the campaign, now has to worry that customers may start

associating its new corporate logo with unreliable service and long delays—particularly as Jones' voice is the recording people hear first when they try to call information, only to be told that “because of the strike, information cannot be obtained at this time.”

With most of its service staff out on strike, Verizon's repairs have been delayed and new service installation has basically halted, which poses the threat of lost income and lost customers in a newly competitive industry. As 30,000 management personnel try to do the work of the nearly 90,000 workers out on strike, the company's information system has collapsed, with many callers getting recordings saying that they should call back later.

Clearly feeling the pressure, Verizon reportedly has agreed to a key union demand—that workers in its wireless and Internet units will have the right to join a union through a “card check”



Appall-o-Meter

By David Futrelle

Truck You 8.8

It's best to get these things in writing. Two Ohio residents are currently fighting in court over an alleged truck-for-sex deal that went bad. Come again? As the *Akron Beacon Journal* reports, Barberton, Ohio resident Rick Remmy apparently offered to sell his ride for \$300 in cash and \$400 in sexual favors to one Karen Kershaw of Akron. According to court documents filed by Kershaw (available online at www.thesmokinggun.com), she agreed to the cash payment but not the sex, thinking that Remmy wasn't “serious about that part of said offer.” In any case, she never came up with the agreed-upon amount of cash—or all those sexual favors—and he never handed over the truck.

So now the case has come to small claims court, and the details are even stranger. Though the crudely scrawled “contract” filed with the courts is unclear

on just how much each act of sex is worth, it suggests that Remmy was willing to value oral sex at roughly \$40 to \$50 a pop and “good fucks” at anywhere from \$50 to \$66.67 apiece.

Though Kershaw says she never agreed to this unique installment plan, and found it deeply offensive, another dodgy document filed in court (a few barely readable scrawls scratched onto an envelope) suggests that she'd actually made several, uh, payments in this manner. The complaint Kershaw filed with the court acknowledges only that she “touch[ed]” Remmy on two occasions, and then only after “said Defendant did harangue and berate Plaintiff” until she reluctantly went along with his wishes.

Kershaw, embarrassed by the whole thing, only wants her money back. And, as far as we can make it out, she won't accept it in the form of sexual favors.

Work for Love 5.9

Speaking of sex for pay: In a unique

twist on long-standing traditions of employer stinginess, one German firm in the online sex business recently claimed that it shouldn't have to pay social security for its workers—because their jobs, which involved chatting for pay with lusty customers, were immoral (albeit perfectly legal). Luckily, Reuters reports, the German courts didn't buy this argument, and the unnamed firm now must pay roughly half a million dollars worth of contributions for its staff.



TERRY LABAN

instead of having to go through a formal National Labor Relations Board-supervised union election. In a card check, the employer promises to accept union status when a simple majority of workers in a unit sign cards saying they want a union. Such an agreement, if included in any contracts, would represent a big advance for the wireless and Internet industries—both of which have been notoriously nonunion and anti-union to date.

Prior to the strike, Verizon had been opposed to all efforts to organize its wireless and Internet units. In July, the CWA filed a complaint with the NLRB alleging that Verizon told employees in Woburn, Massachusetts that they could not distribute union literature or discuss unionization at the company site—a serious violation of labor rights.

Verizon is facing mounting pressure from Wall Street not to cave in to union demands. One financial analyst estimates that if Verizon Wireless were unionized, it would add as much as \$300 million to the company's annual wage costs. That may not seem like much for an operation that generated \$5.5 billion in revenues this year, but in the highly competitive wireless market, profit margins are slim.

The two sides are also at odds over several other key issues, notably mandatory overtime, which currently has some workers putting in as many as 15 hours a week of extra work time, and high stress levels among information service operators.

While the unions are fighting to establish a foothold in the new economy, CWA spokeswoman Candice Johnson insists that the issues themselves are not new. "The technology is changing, but the issues are old ones," Johnson says. "The right to join a union, mandatory overtime, work-related stress, these are all pretty standard issues for working people."

Maybe so. But if Verizon's workers succeed in opening the door to unionizing the company's wireless and Internet units, it is bound to have a ripple effect across the "new economy" industries. Competing wireless operations at companies like Sprint, Worldcom, Nextel, VoiceStream and U.S. Cellular are virtually union-free today, and are watching the Verizon negotiations closely—as, no doubt, are many of their workers. ■

A Step Forward Illinois Death Row inmates granted new hearings

By Kari Lydersen

CHICAGO—After years of fighting—sending letters and court documents to media outlets all over the world, organizing protests and benefits from his cell, working on his case tirelessly—Aaron Patterson is a significant step closer to getting off Illinois' notorious Death Row. On August 10, the Illinois Supreme Court announced it was ordering new evidentiary hearings, retrials and resentencings in six death penalty cases. Patterson won a new evidentiary hearing, which could lead to a new trial.

Patterson has been on Death Row since 1990, when he was convicted of the 1986 murder of an elderly Chicago couple. Patterson was convicted largely on the basis of an unsigned confession and the testimony of a teen-age girl who has since recanted her story. There is no physical evidence linking him to the crime (see

"Justice Denied," October 3, 1999).

Patterson alleges he was tortured by former Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge and his underlings, and that detectives fabricated the confession used to convict him. He never signed the confession, and he says he verbally agreed to their story only to end hours of beatings. Burge was fired in 1993 after an internal investigation found he had systematically tortured more than 60 black men.

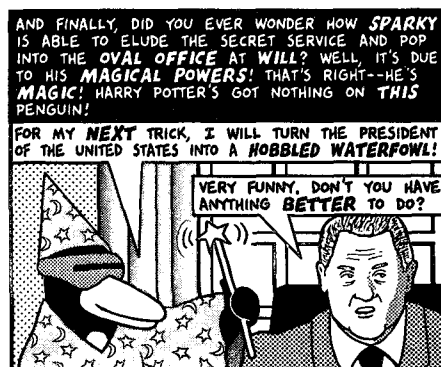
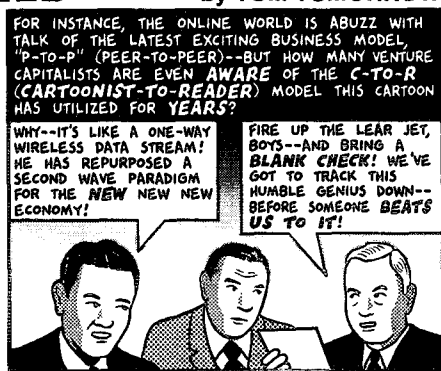
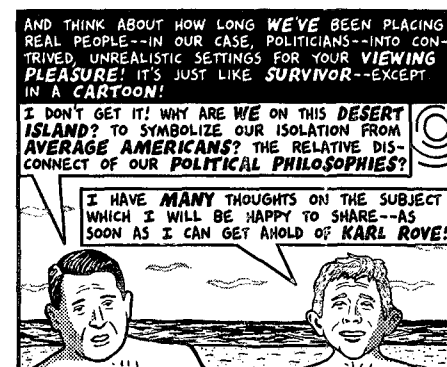
Patterson's evidentiary hearing will examine whether his original defense counsel failed to present available evidence that his confession had been coerced, and whether there is sufficient new evidence of torture to warrant a new trial.

Derrick King, another of the "Death Row 10" inmates who were allegedly tortured by Burge, was also awarded a new evidentiary hearing.

The court decisions come among snowballing opposition to the death penalty. In January, Republican Gov. George Ryan declared a moratorium after 13 innocent men were released from Illinois' Death Row. A committee convened by Ryan is currently meeting to recommend ways to ensure fairness in the justice system. ■

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



Vote To Renew the Left

By Doug Ireland

What speaker at the Shadow Convention in Los Angeles said the following: "The big story at the Democratic Convention is really influence buying and peddling"? He went on to say that both the Democratic and Republican conventions "are basically now corporate trade shows for the delegates, while the main show is behind closed doors at big dollar soft money fundraisers which, make no mistake, are setting the agenda for Congress and America as a whole ... the conventions are playing host to what may well be the worst display of fundraising and corruption in the political history of our nation."

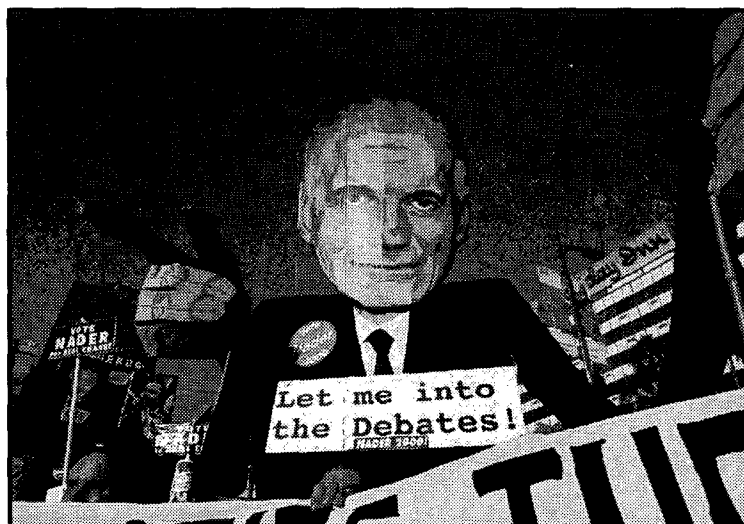
No, it wasn't Ralph Nader. It was the Democratic senator from Wisconsin, Russ Feingold, denouncing the corporate takeover of his own party. While the hapless and stifled delegates from unions and minority communities were feeding on corn dogs at the Santa Monica pier, the fat cats were provided with an official Democratic Convention Passport, which allowed them free entry to four dozen luxurious gobblings at Spago and other watering holes for the wealthy. This *ausweis* for the affluent symbolized who really has power in the Clinton/Gore Democratic Party, for the events were paid for by Big Oil, Big Tobacco, Big Liquor, the high-tech robber barons, the military contractors and Wall Street.

A vote for Ralph Nader is not a vote for the Republicans, it is a vote against the kind of systemic corruption that the Oil Twins, Gush and Bore, represent. For the first time in living memory, an independent presidential candidate of the left is getting a serious hearing from the voters. Everywhere he goes, Nader's campaign speeches are left-wing civic lessons, dissecting the malevolent effects of corporate power and teaching how to organize against it. Nader has the rumpled charisma of an honest man, which makes a refreshing contrast to the empty, focus-group-driven scripts of his major-party opponents, and the polls show that people are beginning to listen.

American history teaches us that insiders don't make change, outsiders do. The farmer-labor populist revolt of the late 19th century paved the way for Teddy Roosevelt's trust-busting; the Socialist-Communist-Progressive left of the Great Depression made possible the New Deal's most structure-changing innovations; even Henry Wallace in 1948 permitted Harry Truman to run further to the left than that conservative machine Democrat otherwise would have done.

Even if you believe that reconstructing a meaningful left-wing inside the Democratic Party is the only way forward, you should be smart enough to cast your vote for Nader. The political classes respond only when electoral pain is inflicted upon them. And in the unlikely event that Gore wins the White House, the corporate-funded, center-right shredders of the FDR/LBJ legacy will use their presidential power to smother the re-emergence of genuinely progressive Democratic Party insurgencies. They'll keep recruiting millionaire candidates for the Senate and Congress, such as Jon Corzine, the union-busting downsizer and former head of Goldman Sachs, who spent nearly \$40 million to buy a Senate nomination in New Jersey. The sad collection of mediocrities, trimmers and mendacious sellouts the party foisted on the electorate in the last several election cycles testifies to what the winning-is-everything crowd will offer us in the future.

The choice of the odious little moralizer Joe Lieberman, the chairman of the DLC, as his running mate gives the lie to



Gore's phony populist rhetoric and tells you where he really wants to take his party. Lieberman, who invoked Ronald Reagan in his Los Angeles acceptance speech, is so busy trying to explain away his previous positions (for the privatization of Social Security, for school vouchers, against affirmative action) that he's useless against the Republicans. And his pandering to cultural conservatives with his partner-in-censorship Bill Bennett should give pause to anyone who believes in cultural and sexual freedom.

That Nader is doing as well as he is, with only pennies to spend, signifies the powerful appeal of his message to an electorate whose majority makes clear its disgust with our corrupt political system by not voting. You want a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives? Support the Nader campaign, which has the potential to bring back to the voting booths millions of voters unlikely to vote Republican.

The left abandons its claims to the moral high ground when it supports corrupt corporate whores like Clinton and Gore. A vote for Citizen Ralph is not a vote for George W.—it's a vote to begin the long, arduous process of rebuilding an electoral left, both outside and inside the Democratic Party. And if not now, when? ■

Let's Win This One First

By Joel Bleifuss

One recent evening in Minneapolis, two couples, longtime friends and Democratic Farm Labor Party activists, argued passionately over Gore and Nader. To vote for Nader was an exercise in self-indulgence, said one. The Democrats must be taught a lesson, said the other. The discussion ended when the Nader partisans got up in the middle of dinner and left the house. The Gore supporters fear the friendship has been irreparably damaged.

That is just one example of the strong feelings the Nader campaign has aroused. If the volume of mail we've received at *In These Times* is any indication, this issue has divided the left like no other. By and large, the debate is over tactics, not policy. On almost all issues, Ralph Nader holds a better position than Al Gore. Minnesota Sen. Paul Wellstone acknowledged this during a recent interview on Minnesota Public Radio. "I'm not going to be attacking Ralph Nader, because I agree with him on many of the issues," Wellstone said. But he went on to explain that he plans to vote for Gore because too many votes for Nader could throw the election to Bush, who, as Wellstone puts it, "wants to repeal the 20th century."

Nader supporters point to their candidate's superior position on the issues and maintain that the differences between Gore and Bush are not large enough to justify continued fidelity to the Democratic ticket. When asked on *Meet The Press* if he was worried about his candidacy throwing the election to Bush, Nader replied: "Not at all. I mean, you're dealing with Democratic do-littles and Republican do-nothings. And that's just not enough for the American people."

"You're dealing with Democratic do-littles and Republican do-nothings," Nader says. "And that's just not enough for the American people."

Nader's absolutist argument strikes a chord with many. We on the left have always had a hard time distinguishing between compromising our beliefs (maintaining personal integrity) and engaging in political compromise (participating in the give-and-take of civil society). This sectarianism, though understandable, is something we must outgrow.

As far as I can make out, the pro-Nader argument

goes something like this: Bush may be worse than Gore, but it is time to take a stand against the Democrats' rightward drift and teach them a lesson. If in the short run under President Bush things are worse, in the long run they will get better. After all, if Gore loses, we won't have Lieberman waiting in the wings eight years from now, and the Democratic Party might return to its roots. Or, if the Democrats go down in flames because of the Nader campaign, out of the ashes will rise a bright and shining Green Party to reckon with. Unfortunately, too often things don't get worse before they get better—they just get worse and worse.

Remember 1980, when progressive voters also argued that there was no difference between the Democratic and Republican candidates and that it was time to send a message to the powers that be. Those who "voted their conscience" and cast ballots for John Anderson or Barry Commoner, instead of Jimmy Carter, may have felt better, but those noble gestures were not much help during the Reagan administration for the air traffic controllers whose union was busted, the poor who found their access to legal aid curtailed, and the tens of thousands of people who died in the covert wars in Central America.

In addition to real people really suffering, during 12 years of Reagan and Bush père, national political debate shifted to the right, as did the Democrats under the influence of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC). As a result, you had Democratic President Clinton championing a ham-fisted welfare reform package that aimed not to end welfare as we know it, but to defend his right flank in the 1996 election. Clinton could get away with that because there was no political organization on the left to challenge him.

Centrist Democrats have the DLC to support their caucus in Congress, the New Democrat Coalition. Left-leaning Democrats lack their own version of the DLC. Consequently, members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus don't have the institutional infrastructure to put their ideas and policies into the public arena. (The Institute for Policy Studies has tried to build public support for the Progressive Caucus' Fairness Agenda, but the funding community, upon which we all depend, has shied away.)

In his speech at Arianna Huffington's "Shadow Convention" in Los Angeles, Wellstone spoke of the need to build an organization that could provide the political muscle the left now lacks, fueled by people rather than corporate dollars—in other words, a progressive answer to the DLC. "Regardless of what point you take vis-à-vis the vice president or Ralph Nader," Wellstone said, "when this is over I believe we need to build an independent political force—I didn't say third party—some kind of vehicle whereby we put forward the ideas, we put forward the policies, we recruit people to run for office, and we back them up with people who know how to manage campaigns. I'm tired of waiting."

Amen. That's the long-term tack to take. But first we have to get through November, remembering, I hope, that while the Democrats are far from perfect, there is a difference between them and the Republicans. That difference makes a difference, maybe not to the well-being of middle-class Nader supporters, but certainly to those people whose quality of life depends on federal programs. ■

The Trouble with Al

By David Moberg
Los Angeles

In the end, Al Gore came back home, back to the bedrock populism that has been the strength of the Democratic Party, back to a political perspective that might have pleased his father—a border-state senator who opposed the Vietnam War and supported civil rights. In his promise to fight for “working families” and his indictment of the Republicans—“they’re for the powerful, and we’re for the people”—Gore defined himself in his acceptance speech much as progressives in the party had hoped he would.

“If he takes a populist tone and hammers on the issues, then we’ll win,” Rep. Jan Schakowsky, a progressive from Illinois had said hopefully before his speech. “People want to hear he’s on their side.”



L.A. CONFIDENTIAL

By Bob Burnett

For a behind-the-scenes look at this year's Democratic Convention, In These Times turned to Bob Burnett. A longtime social activist in the Bay Area and supporter of the magazine, Burnett is also one of the founders of Cisco Systems. The following is a diary of his trip to Los Angeles.

DAY 1: SADDLE UP, PILGRIMS

Los Angeles. The Lourdes of the West—where Americans come to bathe in the healing waters of glamour and fame. And here Al Gore will come to accept his party's nomination and (we hope) get a transfusion of energy for his lacerated campaign. Lord, heal this candidate! Please grant him a new personality! (Somebody say, *Amen*.)

I'm here to see if I can find a reason to be enthusiastic about Gore. As this campaign has developed, I have found it

increasingly reminiscent of 1968, when we all were so angry at the Democratic Party in general, and Hubert Humphrey in particular (a decent man, strikingly similar to Gore), that we didn't vote (or voted for third party candidates) and got Richard Nixon elected. That again seems an increasingly likely scenario: Many of us will abandon the Democrats, and Dubya (with the campaign of Clinton, the soul of Nixon, and the mind of Quayle) will be elected.

So I probably will vote for Gore—unenthusiastically. But I want some reasons beyond abortion and gun control. Maybe, before the week is over, I'll find these reasons. I hope so.

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My day starts at a conference on “The Impact of Information Technology on American Democracy” at the Biltmore Hotel. The most interesting panelist, journalist Farai Chideya, points out that

the Internet is still the province of the white establishment and asks what we are going to do to close the digital divide. The most unexpected response comes from Gerald Levin (yes, the same Gerry Levin who, as CEO of Time-Warner, engineered the merger with AOL). He says the answer is not merely putting more computers in schools: We actually need to pay teachers more and give them more training.

A lot of discussion ensues about how to get young people involved in the political process. They're not tuning in to the parties' Web sites, and there's fear that they find the current political scene dull and irrelevant. Nobody seems to notice that young folks have used the Web to mobilize anti-WTO protests and organize cultural events like the “Burning Man” festival. A lot of brainpower is used trying to come up with an apt assessment of the Internet. They don't get close.

This strategy could lift the sagging Gore campaign if he pursues it with conviction until November. Despite the strong economy, there is deep popular discontent. Polls indicate that voters are almost evenly divided on whether the country is on the right track. They also think the wealthy and big corporations have prospered in recent years, but not everyone else—a fairly accurate perception. They are looking for improvements in education, health care and retirement security rather than tax cuts. Gore's promises to stand up to powerful interests such as "big tobacco, big oil, the big polluters, the pharmaceutical companies, the HMO's," and to "work for you every day" and "never let you down" could be a powerful message.

If people believe it.

"The trouble with Al Gore," quips comedian Will Durst, "is that I believe a lot of what he says—until he says it." Gore's credibility problem has less to do with his personality than with history. He may be intelligent, erudite and experienced, but he has hardly distinguished himself as a consistent partisan of "working families." Nonetheless, although he lacks the folksy charm that allows Clinton to appear to be a man of the people, Gore did come across in his acceptance speech as earnest, well-intentioned and even a little humble, making the case that the presidential election was not a popularity contest but "a day-by-day fight for the people."

Leading up to the convention, it had looked like Gore was preparing to fight the election on Republican theocratic turf, forming a ticket with Connecticut Sen. Joseph Lieberman that seemed more ready to do battle with Satan than with big corporations. Lieberman himself once had a reputation as a fighter—for civil rights and later for consumer

protections—but more recently he had become a critic of affirmative action and a willing servant of his state's big insurance companies. The veep choice also underscored the connection that both men have to the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), the corporate-funded faction of the party that is ardently pro-business and equally hostile to any policies that would regulate business or redistribute wealth and income.

Similarly, Gore's pledge to reform campaign finance—while vastly superior to Bush's determination to give money more influence over politics—runs up against both his recent history as an especially aggressive fundraiser and the overwhelming corporate funding evident at the convention itself. "This convention is all about money, and especially corporate money," Wisconsin Sen. Russell Feingold told the dissident Shadow Convention. Yet despite Gore's admission that he is an "imperfect messenger" of campaign finance reform, Feingold hopes Gore will make it a central issue in the campaign.

The clash of corporate influence and Gore's populist credibility recurs time and again. For example, he promised to "honor equal rights and fight for an equal day's pay for an equal day's work." Yet Gore, like the administration in which he served, has been unwilling to champion the key working women's legislative demand—equal pay for work of comparable worth. It's a winner with women of all income levels, whose support Gore desperately needs, but it also has strong support from men, who recognize that their families would benefit from their wives bringing home more money. But after years of unsuccessfully pleading for support, Gail Shaffer of Business and Professional Women/USA has concluded that the Clinton/Gore administration held back because they were only

Paraphrasing Chairman Mao, however, Macintosh guru Guy Kawasaki makes a lame attempt: "The Internet will bloom like 1,000 flowers."

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Later, I head to the Beverly Hills Hotel for a party thrown by the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee and paid for by a clutch of real estate interests. (Full disclosure: My wife Kathy and I were invited to this and other events because we gave money to the DSCC.)

The speeches are predictable: We'd be better off with Patrick Leahy than Jesse Helms as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. We Democrats are the real reformers. We're responsible for the economic prosperity (the one caused by the Internet revolution; the one that doesn't seem to be reaching half of society—but no one talks about that). Blah blah blah.

Afterward, during the schmooze-around, everyone is worried about Gore.

Does he have a chance? Will adding Lieberman to the ticket make a difference?

DAY 2: A TALE OF TWO CONVENTIONS

To get into the Staples Center for the Democratic Convention, you have to take a special security bus and pass through three checkpoints and a metal detector before entering the building (a lot like attending high school in L.A.). A half-mile away at Arianna Huffington's Shadow Convention, you park across the street and try to get past the guy handing out *Worker's World*.

Get ready for a quiz:

At which convention were these words spoken?

1. "Don't stop thinking about tomorrow."
2. "How can we call this prosperity, how can we talk about justice, when so many of our children go hungry?"
3. "We built the bridge to the 21st century, and we're not going back."

4. "We live in a culture of violence, a culture of racial and economic apartheid, a culture of sexism, and a culture of greed, addiction and materialism."

5. "If you want to live like a Republican, vote like a Democrat."

OK, pencils down.

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At 5 p.m. the Democratic Convention begins with a parade of prominent women. It segues from senator to senator until Maryland's Barbara Mikulski introduces Hillary Clinton. Her theme is: "I have too done something!" She actually has her own record of accomplishment, she insists, particularly the defense of children.

Earlier in the day, I heard author Jonathan Kozol speak of the horrifying conditions in which poor children live. He remarked that the only politician who hadn't lied to him about helping these kids was Paul Wellstone. There was no mention of Hillary.

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willing to cross big corporations on a few issues at a time. This is hardly an example of making hard decisions to do the right thing against powerful interests, as Gore has promised to do.

In a fleeting reference to one of the most divisive issues among Democrats, Gore argued for "fair trade," saying that "we must set standards to end child labor, to prevent the exploitation of workers and the poisoning of the environment." It was broadly, if mildly, in tune with the views of organized labor—as well as the majority of Americans. Clinton had promised the same when he first ran for president—but did nothing to implement the idea. It may not be popular with the big corporate donors to the party, but if the administration had taken the pledge to protect workers rights and the environment seriously, Gore would not be in such bad shape in the polls now.

TIM SLOAN/AFP



The list of hypocrisies and discrepancies between Gore's populist campaign message and his political record could go on and on. But ultimately it is good that he has decided to run his campaign as a populist. Although there were still plenty of "New Democrat" flourishes—like emphasizing debt reduction, attacking popular culture and hiring more police—the campaign now is at least in part a rebuff of the DLC, which urges Democrats to focus their campaigns on white, middle-class families making more than \$50,000 a year and to shun any intimations that powerful corporations might be responsible for the problems faced by many Americans.

Gore's decision to be a working-class tribune is an implicit recognition that he has weak support even among traditional

Democrats. To the extent that Gore relies on progressive movements and working-class voters, he may also be more beholden to them if he wins. Although they argued that Gore would be more easily influenced than Bush, leaders of the party's left-wing, such as Rev. Jesse Jackson and Los Angeles mayoral contender Antonio Villaraigosa, argued in meetings at the convention that the prospects for progressive policies depend ultimately on strengthening popular movements.

The New Democrats, most analysts argue, helped the party neutralize Republican attacks on liberalism by being tough on crime, urging elimination of welfare, emphasizing personal responsibility and favoring budgetary restraint. While that tactic has been successful, to judge from opinion

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A few days ago, I asked some friends in Berkeley if they would vote for Clinton if he were running again. They said they would. ("He may be slime, but he's our slime.") They all believed Clinton could defeat Dubya in the general election.

Clinton makes a rock-star entrance into the convention. The picture flashed on the huge TV monitors shows him slowly walking into the arena, while a list of his accomplishments scrolls across the bottom of the screen. ("Economy up 35 consecutive quarters" ... "Teen pregnancy at lowest rate in 30 years" ... Sexual harassment up 42 percent ...) By the time he finishes his interminable stroll through the bowels of the Staples Center, the crowd is near hysteria.

Even by Clinton standards his speech is a *tour de force*. The theme is simple: The Republicans do not understand the economy. They do not understand that "the purpose of prosperity is to grow a community." Al Gore must be elected to

extend his legacy.

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After the convention, I attend a party on the Paramount Studios backlot with Kathy and a few thousand intimate friends. The host is California Gov. Gray Davis (motto: "Vote for me or go to prison"). At the end, the governor appears on stage with the Clintons. He presents Bill with his very own "Oscar." And so we say good-bye to Bill. Or do we?

How can we miss you if you won't go away?

DAY 3: NO CHOICE

During the day Kathy and I go to a luncheon hosted by the largest Democratic PAC—Emily's List, which promotes pro-choice female candidates (and of which we've been longtime supporters). There's a certain note of desperation in the speeches. The number of women in Congress has greatly increased in the past eight years (California alone has two

women senators and 11 women in Congress). But voters turn out for the top of the ticket. That means if Dubya wins, women will lose.

Dianne Feinstein steps onto stage. I'm not a big fan. While we are close to the same age, she has always seemed to come from a different century, the world of Queen Victoria not Queen Latifah. But her speech slowly wins me over. She takes a more personal tone than I've heard before: She describes what it was like in the '50s, when she first entered the work force, and her first political campaigns of the '60s, when female supporters had to get their husband's permission before they could write a check.

When she talks of the world before *Roe v. Wade*, the room gets very still. She recalls a time when her sorority sisters passed the hat because one of them needed an abortion. She remembers women she knew who committed suicide because they were pregnant. My own

Instead of spending all his time in elementary schools, crawling around on the floor, it might be good to join a picket line.

polls, it has often taken its toll (reinforcing the destructive war on drugs, expanding the death penalty and settling for an overly harsh and unsupportive version of welfare reform). On other counts, such as supporting corporate-friendly trade deals, the New Democrats have increased their fundraising but alienated voters.

Apart from the merit of any individual New Democrat policy idea—and many are acceptable to progressives—there are some fundamental weaknesses in their strategy. As Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers argue in their new book, *America's Forgotten Majority*, what at first appealed as a way of providing tactical political cover for preserving core Democratic values, became an increasingly conservative strategy of mov-

ing away from government intervention in the economy on behalf of working people. In 1992, Clinton talked of balancing rights and responsibilities for everyone. But in practice his demand for accountability and responsibility applied mainly to the poor, not corporations. Since the "third way" is defined mainly as an alternative to liberalism and conservatism, it simply moves debate to the right, while undermining any alternative on the left.

Yet for a political philosophy that was designed primarily as a way to succeed electorally, the most damning indictment of the New Democrat approach is that the Democrats have lost ground in the House, Senate, state legislatures and governorships since Clinton was elected. Furthermore, the comeback in Congress after 1994 was largely a result of more vigorous defense of "old Democrat" programs, like the minimum wage and Social Security—as well as aggressive mobilization by the labor movement, which is often at odds with New Democrat proposals.

The New Democrat approach was developed in an era when budget deficits constrained political ambition, but the continuing economic squeeze on most working-class families combined with the prospect of budget surpluses has opened up new opportunities for dramatic initiatives. At a panel discussion sponsored by the Campaign for America's Future, pollster Stanley Greenberg argued that Gore's best hope was to focus on issues and "clearly define contrasts with bold proposals in tune with the current mood of the country," especially education. "The public is ready for bold," he said. "George Bush can't compete on bold."

The Democrats clearly have decided to draw contrasts on health care, especially their advocacy of a patient's bill of rights, prescription drug coverage for seniors, and health

LA CONFIDENTIAL

personal history is pushed in my face. I have agonized over an untimely pregnancy and accompanied a loved one to an abortion clinic. So this election is about choice. Will we continue to fight for equality and women's rights, or will we return to the Dark Ages?

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At the convention we go everywhere by bus—very slowly. But this gives us lots of time to chat with the conventioners. I'm struck by what good folks they seem to be—maybe not radicals, but each working in their own way for change in their communities.

But they don't understand what the protests are about. "What are they so angry about? Why don't they protest against the Republicans?"

I enumerate some of the issues being highlighted: globalization, economic inequality, environmental degradation, draconian drug laws. The others on the bus say they too are concerned about

these issues. They ask: "Why are they protesting against us?"

DAY 4: MONEY TALKS

I listen to a presentation about "The Progressive Caucus on the Democratic National Platform" at the Shadow Convention. Hecklers frequently interrupt their presentation, shouting out helpful advice such as: "Leave the Democrats, vote for Nader."

It turns out that the Progressive Caucus tried to add four amendments to the platform. They called for providing universal health care, narrowing the gap between rich and poor (by raising the minimum wage to a living wage), requiring that international treaties provide stronger labor protections, and stopping production on the "Star Wars" missile defense system. Sounds good. When they attempted to present these amendments to the platform committee, of course, they were steamrolled by the

Gore folks. There wasn't even any debate.

Gloria Allred, a Hispanic political commentator and convention delegate, says the Gore campaign is intent on keeping the convention as vanilla-flavored as possible, only offering up a few carefully chosen facets—like being pro-choice—to differentiate themselves from the Republicans. She's disheartened and disillusioned. "We're what's left of the left," she notes ruefully of the Progressive Caucus, which has been banished to the sidelines.

She still plans to vote for Gore.

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Also at the Shadow Convention, Wisconsin Sen. Russ Feingold notes the rise of visible symbols of corporate influence at the Democratic Convention (from the American Airlines hospitality buffet to our free tube of sunscreen courtesy of The Gap). He calls it vote buying and warns that we're becoming a "corporate democracy."

insurance coverage for children as a gradual step toward universal health coverage. Gore will oppose school vouchers and advocate more money for school modernization, smaller classrooms, early childhood education, teacher training and tax breaks for college costs. At best this amounts to "bold lite." Gore will also draw the line with Bush by opposing privatization of Social Security and big across-the-board tax cuts tilted to the rich. That defense is ultimately good but not exactly bold.

Perhaps Gore's boldest proposal is the least progressive: paying down the national debt and balancing the budget, even in a recession. These old Republican nostrums are unpopular politically, and they make little sense: being truly bold on both education and health care would pay off more both socially and economically than debt reduction in good times. In a recession, balancing the budget only would compound problems.

The Gore agenda at least enlarges on the mini-initiatives Clinton adopted and provides a contrast on important points with Bush (including non-economic issues, like reproductive rights). Ultimately, making a sharp contrast means Gore will have to dismantle the aura of compassionate conservatism and "take on Bush on his past record," argues AFSCME President Gerald McEntee. While Gore may personally try to take the high road, one labor leader argued, union members will be most motivated by fear of Bush and congressional Republicans, not Gore's positive proposals.

But Gore does need to actively establish himself as a fighter. Instead of spending all his time in elementary schools, crawling around on the floor, it might be good to join a picket line, as Sen. Paul Wellstone did during the convention

with workers in Santa Monica from the Loew's Hotel—a corporation headed by a major Gore financial backer. In a videotaped speech to the AFL-CIO delegates, Gore energetically promised to strengthen laws to protect the right of workers to organize. The promise was not part of the acceptance speech to the national audience, however (even though labor unions have a more favorable public-image rating than Gore himself, according to a recent Greenberg poll).

Gore's advocacy of a somewhat more activist government offered an opportunity to redefine the Republican issue of values and morality as well. Gore argued that the honor of the presidency entails raising the minimum wage to honor work, providing child care to honor children, preserving affirmative action to honor equality. But Gore could go much farther in delineating a public morality, such as replacing the drug war with a strategy to minimize harm or calling for a moratorium on the death penalty, a move now supported by 63 percent of the public that would starkly contrast with Bush's record.

Gore heads into the fall stretch of the campaign with an amalgam of so-called old and New Democrat ideas. The populist wrapping rhetorically falls short of even a patrician Franklin Roosevelt denouncing "malefactors of great wealth," but it keeps alive a suggestion of the working-class oriented politics that has served Democrats well. But lurking within this populist integument is the contradictory force of big corporate money that is even more overwhelming in this year's election. Is it possible to lead the charge against the powerful interests while taking their money? Not likely. But the populist Gore is still the best incarnation of the candidate that the Democrats could hope to find. ■

David Moberg is a senior fellow of the Nation Institute.

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Back at the main event, our seats are sponsored by Delta Queen Coastal Voyages. When all of the Democratic women in Congress come out on stage, one of the Delta Queen lobbyists asks, "Who are those women?" Kathy tells him, and without missing a beat, he asks, "Where do they stand on maritime policy?"

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Joe Lieberman's acceptance speech is received at the convention with the same level of rock-star enthusiasm that greeted Clinton. The speech is about tolerance. It's touching to hear the personal stories of Joe and Hadassah, how their families fled persecution and came to America. He segues from this to his experience as a civil rights worker with Martin Luther King and then promises to support affirmative action: "Mend it, don't end it," he says.

He's personable and believable. This convention really needed him. Now the stage is cleared for Al Gore.

DAY 5: MOJO PROBLEMS

All week there has been an unstated apprehension among the Democrats about Gore's acceptance speech. They've been praying that he will be less wooden and more personable, leaving the party faithful with some fire in their bellies and showing the public that he is a real leader. I've come to think of this as Gore's "mojo problem." He doesn't keep his mojo working. By way of comparison, Bill Clinton doesn't have this problem (if anything he's got an over-active mojo).

Gore doesn't disappoint the faithful. He enters through the packed arena, shaking hands with people in the crowd. It seems to loosen him up. His speech hits its stride when he proclaims, "I am my own man."

The balance of the speech enumerates a detailed list of ways Gore will help working families. He will provide affordable health care. He will make a strong commitment to

education. He will raise the minimum wage. He will protect the environment. He will defend civil rights, affirmative action and abortion rights. He pledges that his No. 1 priority will be campaign finance reform. I believe him.

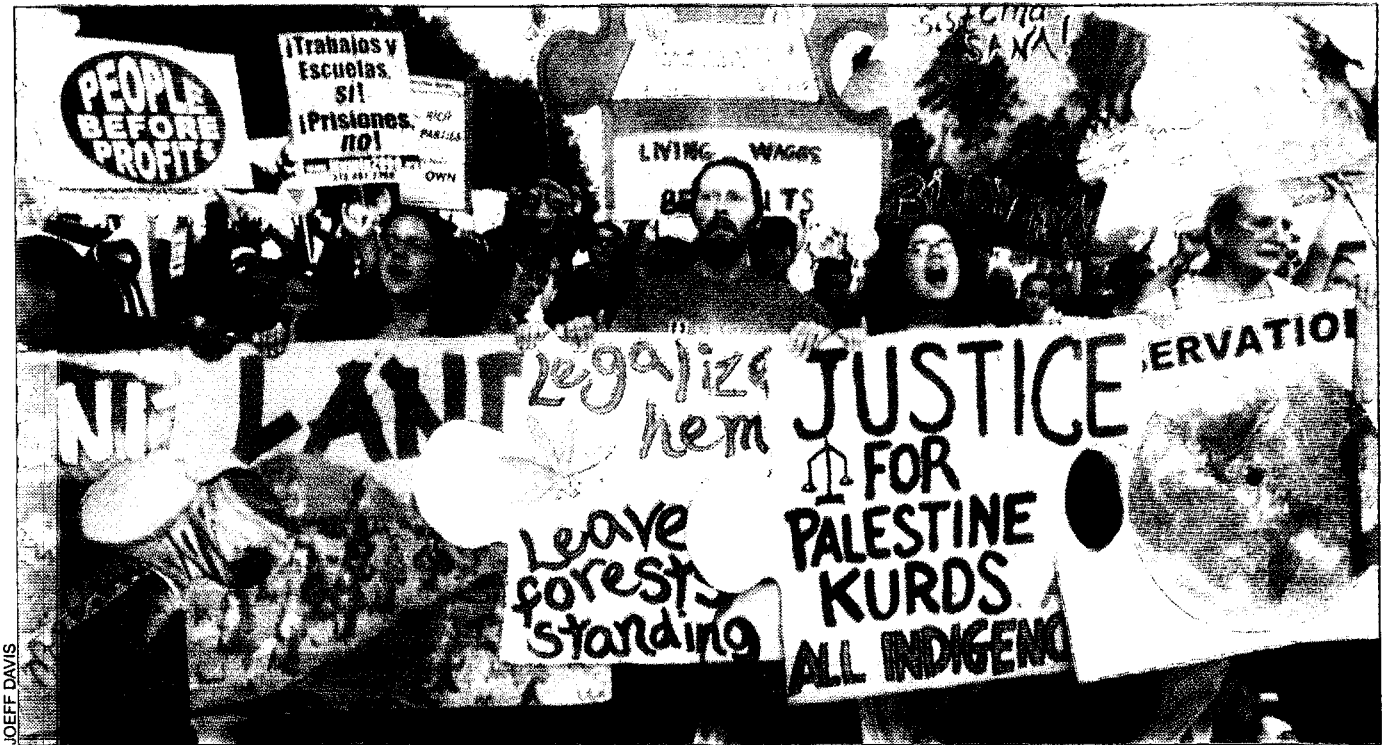
Al definitely has got his mojo working. The folks at the convention are encouraged.

☆☆☆

It's too soon to tell whether Gore really has cured his mojo problem. He is a strangely inconsistent candidate, and it's possible that his campaign will go in the toilet before November. It's also possible that he will blow away Dubya in the debates and win the election handily.

After a week in L.A., I'm convinced that those of us on the left will have to swallow our principles and vote for Gore. He is far from the perfect candidate, but he is a decent man. He has a chance to win if the left supports him. The consequences are just too dreadful if we don't. ■

From Seattle to South Central



What the movement needs to do next

By **Juan Gonzalez**

LOS ANGELES

Around the time the Democrats opened their convention at the Staples Center downtown, Margarita Reyes and her husband, Carlos, were catching an afternoon sandwich inside the tiny shoe and clothing store they own near the intersection of Florence and Normandie avenues. The corner sits at the center of a story most politicians—both New Democrats and New Republicans—would like America to forget.

It was at Florence and Normandie in April 1992 that a crowd of angry blacks gathered after hearing that a Simi Valley jury had acquitted the cops who were caught on videotape brutally beating Rodney King. What followed was the nation's worst riot of the 20th century. By the time it was over, the arson and looting had spread throughout this sprawling city, more than 50 people were dead and thousands had been arrested.

I spent several days back then reporting from the middle of those riots, interviewing looters as they carried off their wares, people fighting to defend their homes and businesses, cops trying to keep the peace, and residents so enraged at the verdict that peace no longer mattered. An enormous sadness fell over me as I wandered through streets so thick with smoke you

could barely see, past the ruins of entire shopping centers, and as I talked to stunned families trying to salvage a few possessions from their burned-down homes.

Even before the rioting, this had been a neighborhood beset by drug trafficking and violence, long abandoned by the scores of factories that once provided its residents with jobs and some measure of hope. At the time, the rest of the country saw it as a black riot, even though the biggest group of people arrested during the disturbances was Hispanic, most of them immigrants picked up by police and National Guard troops for violating curfew or petty looting.

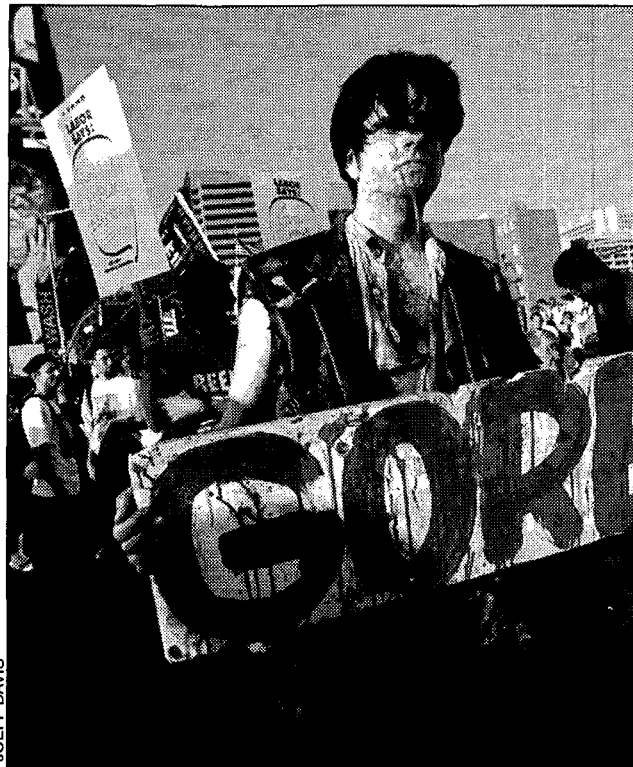
South Central, like the rest of this city, and like so much of our nation, was a place undergoing a startling transformation. It was not only poor, but longtime black residents were moving out and being rapidly replaced by Mexican and Central American immigrants—newcomers fleeing a poverty and desperation in their homelands that could make the worst ghetto in this country seem like paradise.

Only eight years later, that transformation is even more pronounced. You see it in the businesses around Florence and Normandie. Margarita Reyes, who is from El Salvador, and her husband, who is from Guatemala, opened their store only three months ago. Up the street is the Cuba/Mexico Night Club. There is Pancho's convenience store, and Rosa's Party

Supplies, and Hilda's Hair Salon, and Club Las Hadas—all owned by Latinos. None existed there before the riot. And so it goes all over Los Angeles, where Hispanics now comprise 45 percent of all residents. The same scenario is being repeated throughout the country. The number of Hispanics turning out to the polls, joining labor unions and getting involved in American civic life in general has skyrocketed.

Paul Mauldin, a black man and longtime resident, was busy repairing an engine at the Baby I'm Back Auto Care Shop, just down the street from the Reyes' clothing store. Mauldin, 47, moved to Los Angeles from Tyler, Texas in 1977. "All the blacks are moving to Riverside or San Bernardino," he says. "Nothing but Spanish moving in."

Not much has improved in South Central for either group since the riot. Most of those who had no insurance when their homes and businesses were destroyed have fled. Any progress has come from those who stayed to rebuild, and from the new immigrants, who were glad for a chance to buy or rent an abandoned store at a cheap price. City Hall and the politicians in Washington didn't put much money into the neighbor-



hood. "You see any new housing since the riot?" asks George Stevens, a retired city worker whose family has lived in South Central for 50 years. "Nothing's changed for the poor man."

After decades of broken promises, local blacks are deeply bitter. They seethe at a Clinton-era prosperity that whizzed past South Central like traffic on the freeway. I asked Mauldin about the Democrats and the convention downtown. "I don't pay them no mind," he says. "Never voted in my life. Never heard one of them say something made me want to."

The Latino newcomers, on the other hand, haven't had time to become disillusioned. Margarita Reyes became a citizen only this year; her husband is still a permanent resident. She concedes she hasn't followed Gore or Bush and doesn't know what either of them stands for. "It's my first

chance to vote in November," she says. "I'm looking forward to it."

Over at the Staples Center, the Democrats, allegedly the party of working people, spent the week raising more money from big corporate donors and putting on a glitzy performance for television that blissfully ignored the growing number of workers so turned off to politics they refuse to vote; or those, like Reyes, who can't tell Bush and Gore apart. In South

Throwing Away the Key

By Dave Lindorff

PHILADELPHIA—Police may have shown some restraint during several days of increasingly confrontational protests at the Republican National Convention, but the birthplace of American democracy has been looking increasingly authoritarian and hostile to the Bill of Rights.

At the urging of both Police Chief John Timoney and newly elected Mayor John Street, a former black activist turned establishment pol, city prosecutors sought and obtained bail as high as \$1 million for people who they claimed were protest leaders, though the charges

were mostly misdemeanors, not felonies. Timoney has been calling for federal prosecutors to file federal racketeering charges against the leaders of groups like the Ruckus Society, on the grounds that they were allegedly engaged in an interstate conspiracy to cause disruption and criminal mischief.

But if there was any interstate conspiracy, activists say it was among officials trying to prevent protesters in Philadelphia from getting to Los Angeles in time for the Democratic Convention two weeks later. Indeed, there appeared to be a deliberate slowing of the arraignment process in Philadelphia, leaving several hundred arrested protesters to languish in city jails and police lock-ups until well past the end of the Republican Convention and right into the start of the Democratic gathering.

Official conspiracy or not, the police strategy during the protests was clearly to go after the protest leaders, who were

reportedly followed by undercover officers and grabbed off the street when they talked on cellular phones, which were then declared devices of a criminal conspiracy. In a particularly egregious example, on August 1 police arrested 70 people at a warehouse where protest puppets were being made. At the time, police claimed they had received reports of weapons being stored at the site; but despite a thorough search of the building, none were found. The arrests went ahead anyway, along with the destruction and confiscation of the puppets.

A team of activist lawyers called the R2K network, which includes members of the Philadelphia chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, has been representing many of those arrested. In a statement, the guild said: "The response of the city and courts of Philadelphia to protests seems a blatant attempt to silence dissent and seriously curtail First, Fifth and Eighth Amendment rights."

Central, and in the neighborhoods like it across America—those places where people make less than \$20,000 a year—barely two out of 10 adults vote these days. These are neighborhoods neither party has ever really cared about, except for those moments when they explode and spoil the show.

South Central's alienation is in stark contrast to the fiery protests outside both the Republican and Democratic conventions. Despite many attempts by the corporate media to ignore or minimize the dissidents, or to ridicule them as a hodgepodge of advocates for unrelated causes, the street protests and the less confrontational but equally passionate Shadow Conventions, displayed an amazing unanimity in their themes: condemnation of how corporate control of American politics is destroying democracy; of how global capital and the national militaries that protect its expansion threaten the quality of life on our planet and impoverish the majority of its people; of how the war on crime and drugs has become an undeclared racial assault on black and brown America.

While dozens of arrested demonstrators have deliberately made trouble in jail by refusing to provide their names and addresses (and in some cases have removed all of their clothes to make identification from surveillance photos more difficult), released prisoners have also charged that police and jailers have brutalized some prisoners and denied others access to lawyers. "I saw one man hog-tied and dragged down the cell block," says Dan Murphy, 26, who spent seven days in jail after being arrested on August 1 and charged with obstruction of traffic and disorderly conduct. "I also saw a hunger striker who passed out and was twitching on the floor, and they left him without treatment for an hour and a half. Then he was just given smelling salts. I also saw a lot of people with injuries—black eyes, cuts, welts."

By August 7, a week after arrests began, some judges were reducing the



STEVE ANDERSON

high bail against protest leaders to more reasonable levels. After prosecutors conceded that Terrence McGuckin, a Philadelphia community organizer who police had claimed was a leader of the protest actions, was not facing any charges for violent actions, a judge reduced his bail from \$500,000 to \$100,000, allowing him to get out of jail with the posting of a \$10,000 bond.

By August 14, all those arrested during the convention protests reportedly had been arraigned, and most already had been released on bail. The 20 people who remained in jail—all hard-core activists who had refused to divulge their names—were finally released on August 17. In a remarkable show of solidarity, so far none of the hundreds of arrested protesters has copped a guilty plea and accepted a fine. "Everyone so far plans to go to trial and to demand a trial by jury," says Cris Hermes of R2K. "That should sure tie up the court system."

The WTO protests in Seattle last year, of course, were the watershed moment, when this international movement of peoples against the New World Order—a movement that had been developing for years—emerged from the shadows and stunned corporate CEOs and world political leaders alike. Officialdom was unprepared for the willingness of thousands to resort to civil disobedience and to disrupt the normal functioning of a city by undergoing mass arrests. It was taken aback by the cleverness and creativity, by the fervor and devotion of so many young people, who, despite being born and bred in the ultimate individualist consumer society, chose to rebel against the immoral underpinnings of that society—things like child labor in Third World sweatshops or the destruction of the environment

and animal life by global companies drunk with greed.

Our country has seen vibrant social and revolutionary movements rise and fall in the past. This new generation of activists can avoid the pitfalls that crippled or doomed past efforts by learning from the mistakes of those who came before them.

The harsh actions of police and prosecutors has led to some discord in the progressive legal community, with some R2K lawyers criticizing the Philadelphia chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. ACLU legal director Stefan Pressler was initially outspoken in his praise of the police for their handling of the protests, saying as late as August 7 that they had shown "enormous restraint" and "smart tactics" and arguing that reports of jail abuses were "highly unlikely."

But by the end of the week following the convention, after mounting evidence of jailhouse abuses, the ACLU joined the Lawyers Guild and the R2K legal collective to prepare to file lawsuits against the city. Plans are to bring charges for civil rights violations in the arrest of the puppet makers, police brutality during the arrest and detention of demonstrators, and harassment for the arrest of clearly identified medics. ■

Already, after Seattle and the Washington IMF protests, after Philadelphia and Los Angeles, familiar danger signs have appeared. The past should teach us something. Some, enthralled by the spectacular success of Seattle, keep trying to repeat it. Some become enamored of big national showdowns, of the mere power to momentarily disrupt and of the sudden media attention, this being the sugar-coated bullet of modern capitalism. As the size and novelty of national actions ebb and flow—and they inevitably do—some may be tempted to resort to more drastic “vanguard actions” as a substitute, as a means of galvanizing the attention of the very corporate media they condemn, instead of opting to redirect more time back in the neighborhoods, schools and workplaces they came from, educating and organizing more recruits.

Others tend to overlook or pay lip service to the big disconnect that still exists between the new movement, which is largely white and middle-class, and the millions of black, Hispanic and working-class Americans who may sympathize with some of the movement's issues, but don't yet see ways they can become a part of it. While there was more involvement by Third World youth in Los Angeles than in prior protests, I saw disturbing signs of class and racial bias even among some of the most committed protesters in Philadelphia and L.A.

There was, for instance, the young activist outside the West Philadelphia puppet-making center that police raided, arresting 70 people inside who had committed no crime. A phalanx of young cops, most of them black, had been posted outside the warehouse while commanders negotiated the surrender of those inside. The raid itself was inexcusable and a clear violation of basic civil rights, but the cops on the detail were courteous and well-behaved. I listened in astonishment as the young white activist began to berate the black cops, calling them traitors to the memory of Martin Luther King, defenders of racism and oppression, and a variety of other names.

As someone who has spent years chronicling the harrowing experiences of untold numbers of black and Latino cops within urban police departments in this country, I have no doubt that the average black officer encounters and often battles against far more racism than that young radical could ever hope to imagine. Not to recognize that even within the most repressive agencies and institutions of our society there are many men and women of good will battling for justice—people who could be potential allies—is an arrogance and immaturity the new movement cannot afford.

In fact, the movement seems unduly obsessed with generating media attention to how police are treating it. To those of us who grew up and still live in black and brown neighborhoods in this

country or immigrated from the Third World, it is hardly noteworthy that some cops can be brutal, especially when they toss you in jail. Nor is it surprising that when you challenge police authority in disruptive protests at high-profile national events, police departments will use clubs, horses, tear gas and rubber bullets. The police brutality exhibited in the various national

protests during the past year should be condemned, but it hardly compares to the vicious repression and even murders suffered by civil rights and radical groups such as Southern Christian Leadership Conference, SNCC, the Black Panthers, the Republic of New Africa, the Young Lords, the Brown Berets and others in the '60s and '70s, or those that still exist in Africa, Asia and Latin America today.

What is far more troubling, and what must be relentlessly exposed, is the trend toward using obscenely high bails, unconstitutional bans on assembly, pre-emptive strike arrests and conspiracy charges

to prevent the growing movement from being able to organize itself or engage in future mass mobilizations, for the right of assembly is a basic right of any democracy.

Despite its weaknesses, this new movement is maybe the best thing to happen to this country's radicals in a quarter century. It has already shaken up corporate America and the political establishment, and it has shown an amazing ability to get out its message directly to the American people by nurturing new independent media centers that have started to make the first cracks into the corporate stranglehold on mass media. American capitalism, however, has proven to be a resilient system. Those in power were surprised by Seattle, but they are awake now, and they will use ever more sophisticated tactics to isolate and divide the many groups and causes that made Seattle possible.

The movement, on the other hand, must expand to America's heartland, or it will slowly wither and die. That means more time spent in local hometowns, educating and winning over those who now might disagree with its aims. It means airing the contradictions over tactics, methods, strategies and goals between the movement's various components through teach-ins, forums, publications and the Internet, while guarding against the intolerance, splintering and factional fights that over the years have doomed so many radical movements in American society. It means building real and equal partnerships with activists and leaders in Third World communities as well as the labor movement, not just rhetoric about fighting racism and defending workers.

It means, above all, firmly grasping that the road to fundamental change in American society lies not simply in disrupting our downtowns, but in awakening, organizing and providing some vision of a better world to our South Centrals. ■



JOE DAVIS

Exuberance is dedicated to showing how this self-reinforcing cycle of rising prices and expectations feeds on the influences of the mass media, on psychological propensities to overvalue the recent past and one's own experiences, and on tendencies toward herd behavior that are exacerbated in financial markets.

Is all the exuberance in the markets irrational? Shiller is refreshingly disdainful of the Internet—in a recent interview, he unfavorably compared its world-changing impact to the vending machine's—but for whatever reason, in the past five years productivity has been rising significantly faster than in the preceding quarter-century. And leaving technology aside, the past two decades have been very good for American shareholders: The destruction of labor unions, among other factors, has allowed the share of profit in national income to rise to levels not seen in 30 years.

All this is true, but it was true in 1996 too, when stock prices, though high, were nowhere near today's astronomical levels. Since then, if anything, the case for exuberance has gotten weaker: With falling unemployment, the profit rate has fallen somewhat, and official projections suggest a long period of stagnant profits ahead. And anyway, as Shiller points out in some of the book's most informative chapters, every previous boom has had some reasonable basis as well. At the turn of the century, electricity was transforming home and factory; perhaps more importantly, the trusts created by men like Morgan and Rockefeller promised to maintain high profits by abolishing competition. In the '20s, radio and the auto—the true machine that changed the world—were the new technologies, while the newly inaugurated Federal Reserve would prevent financial crises. In the '60s, demand management was supposed to have tamed the business cycle, while TV, aerospace and such consumer-goods innovators as Polaroid (the original “concept stock,” whose PE peaked at a dotcom-worthy 95) offered limitless technological frontiers. All of these fundamentals were real, but all were exaggerated in the heat of the bull market.

On its own terms, Shiller's book is a success. It proves beyond reasonable doubt—if such proof were needed—that today's stock market is

wildly overvalued. There is nothing fundamentally new in today's economy to justify its stock market prices, and plenty of evidence that investors are not the infallible optimizers economic theory makes them out to be. Quickly or slow-

Social outcomes are not always unintended. The economy is shaped as much by the conscious choices of the powerful as by uncoordinated interactions in markets.

ly, in a crash or a long stagnation, the market will deflate. But the question remains: Can we explain away today's overvaluation merely as small-time investors chasing their own tails, or is there something deeper at work?

Shiller spends a great deal of time explaining why ordinary Americans might get caught up in stock market mania (the fact that investors are far from a cross-section of the population largely escapes his notice). But American investors are not the only culprits here. Shiller ignores the vast flows of foreign capital into the United States; while little of this money is spent on stocks, it certainly offers indirect support for the market. And this money is flowing into the United States not because of the fantasies of effortless wealth that may motivate U.S. investors, but because of very real financial instability and crises abroad.

More importantly, Shiller ignores the greatly increased share of corporate profits flowing to shareholders, a key structural shift of the past 20 years—and one that has made stocks much more attractive investments. Stock markets are conventionally supposed to raise money for investment, but as Doug Henwood pointed out in his essential *Wall Street*, the reality is just the opposite: Far more stock is retired each year

than issued. And this imbalance has grown much larger in recent years. Until the early '80s, corporations paid out around one-quarter of their pretax earnings to shareholders each year, taking dividends, stock buybacks and cash acquisitions together. Over the past 15 years, this payout ratio has averaged 75 percent. In some years, the money paid out to shareholders has exceeded the total volume of corporate profits. No wonder shareholders are exuberant.

Shiller isn't unaware of these facts, but they don't make it out of the footnotes to shape his larger analysis. His focus is on individual investors and those who flatter and pander to them. But at the end of the day, the Abby Joseph Cohens and the Beardstown Ladies, the tip sheets and the financial news shows may not be the whole or even the main explanation for the bubble. Shiller's book is valuable because he is attentive to the ways real people behave; he doesn't share most economists' faith in the rationality of markets and the benign operations of the Invisible Hand. But he does share their most basic presupposition, methodological individualism: that, in Adam Smith's famous phrase, society is best understood in terms of individuals, each of whom “intends only his own gain” but is “led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.” Shiller's difference with Smith and the mainstream is simply that he's not so sure the end in question is always for the best.

But social outcomes are not always unintended. The economy is shaped as much by the conscious choices of the powerful as by uncoordinated interactions in markets. Certainly such conscious choices contributed mightily to the stock market boom. In the early '80s, organized shareholders and their allies launched a deliberate and largely successful effort to get their hands on a larger share of corporate income. As Harvard economist Michael Jensen, one of the most articulate advocates for this revenge of the rentiers, put it, “The problem is how to motivate managers to disgorge the cash instead of investing it.”

Solutions to this problem were not long in coming: the leveraged buyout, which made managers and owners one, and siphoned off cash through massive debt payments; the hostile takeover, the

stick raiders such as Carl Icahn and Boone Pickens used so expertly against corporations that negligently let their share prices fall; and the carrot of stock options, to reward managers who willingly disgorged the cash. The result was a redirection of corporate cash flow unprecedented in the postwar period: By the late '80s, net investment for U.S. corporations had fallen from about a third of pretax profits to barely 5 percent, as money that would have gone for new plant and equipment flowed directly into shareholders' pockets.

So the rentiers succeeded; perhaps they succeeded too well. By the late '90s, corporations were "returning" (as we were taught to say in the '80s) virtually all of their earnings to shareholders in cash. With their fine-tuned incentives, managers are now

willing to run up corporate debt to finance share buybacks, literally mortgaging their companies' future for the sake of next year's stock price. The situation is hardly sustainable, but it's not simply a bubble. If Shiller is right—and he almost certainly is—about prospective returns in the stock market, he will be one of the few high-profile market forecasters who is remembered for prescience rather than hubris. At the very least, his book and the respectful reception it has gotten mark a serious break in the relentless boosterism of the bull market. But in its focus on Internet- and media-fed mass psychology and the unplanned enthusiasms of crowds, the book may miss the real story. The exuberance that counts is not in the chatrooms, but the boardrooms. ■

views and vignettes. Along the way, we meet village elders, political activists, unemployed youths; we see churches and mosques, sometimes a chief's house. From these people, we understand that Nigerians are direct, articulate and often funny, and that they love to talk. We also learn that they live on the brink of disaster.

Maier's 1997 book, *Into the House of Ancestors*, similarly comprised of interviews, presented a glimpse of what appeared to be promising prospects for today's Africa. *This House Has Fallen* is decidedly more downbeat. On the whole, stories from contemporary, "underdeveloping" Nigeria are so depressing, and its people so disappointed, that it is almost impossible to feel hope for this country.

Consider, for example, Maier's 1998 meeting with Chief Jim Beeson Wiwa, father of slain activist and writer Ken Saro-Wiwa. Living in Ogoniland, an oil-rich region in the Niger Delta, Chief Wiwa has witnessed one of the great paradoxes in postcolonial Nigeria: the rapid growth of a government-run oil industry that exports nearly 2 million barrels of oil a day, accompanied by a massive decline in living standards. The source of more than 90 percent of Nigeria's export income, the oil industry earns hundreds of billions of dollars for Nigeria, all of which, under military rule, seemed to be sucked up by the government. "Nigeria is sick," Wiwa says. "Our position today is worse. Look at our children here. ... No school; they have no education. And yet, the resources of Nigeria come from Ogoni oil."

On the way to the eastern trading town of Onitsha, Maier talks with ignored veterans of the Biafran War, when the Igbo people fought Nigeria's government for independence and lost in a notoriously bloody conflict. The former Igbo foot soldiers line the highway, hoping for charitable passers-by to offer some food or a wad of naira, the Nigerian currency. Residents of a village called the War Disabled Veterans Camp, the men were promised instruction and work when the war ended 30 years ago; instead they were literally put out to pasture. "We were told we were being sent for rehabilitation and training, but since then we have not seen anything," says one veteran. Nor

Things Fall Apart

By Hillary Frey

Even after a year of democratic leadership, Nigeria is hardly stabilizing. The imposition of *sharia*, Islamic law, is causing turmoil in its vast north-east region, while oil spills and petroleum

fires pollute and strip its damp, lush south. Poverty is pervasive. This is a country where teaching hospitals often lack running water or electricity, where men defecate at the sides of principal thoroughfares, where crippled war veterans beg en masse at roadsides. Nigeria's university system is a shambles, its government confused, its economy a disaster. And Nigeria's estimated 120 million people—who represent more than 300 ethnic groups—are restless.

Although the United States has largely ignored Nigeria's struggles in the past, it would be wise to start paying attention. Nigeria is the biggest U.S. trading partner in Africa, the fifth largest supplier of oil to the American market, and the world's 10th most pop-

ulous nation. At this precarious moment, with a civilian government in power for the first time in nearly 20 years, Nigeria stands as a tall example of West Africa's promise. If it fails, breaking up into separate countries or regions, a civil war is almost certain—one that threatens to be at least as bloody as the Biafran War of the late '60s, which claimed a million Nigerian lives. Furthermore, neighboring West African countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, which have relied on Nigeria in the past for peacekeeping missions, may become further destabilized, throwing the region into turmoil.

This House Has Fallen: Midnight in Nigeria

By Karl Maier
Public Affairs
304 pages, \$26

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will he, as he knows too well: "Nigeria is like us, crippled."

Nigeria's dysfunction is nowhere more visible than in the north, where a different sort of breakdown is happening. In his long chapters on this region, Maier describes the strained relations between

hands cut off. A Christian pastor in the region worries: "If [sharia] continues the rest of Nigeria will just cut off Zamfara and let it go back to the dark ages."

Is Nigeria doomed? Throughout the book, Nigerians reiterate that Olusegun Obasanjo, their democratically elected

including the elimination of corruption, revival of the economy and foreign investment, and the renewal of a strong central government. This, Maier hopes, might occur in tandem with a constitutional conference that would "allow a wide range of representatives from ethnic, religious, labor, women's, political, and business groups to decide how they want to live." A second, more likely, scenario is the continuation of the status quo, "with a civilian government lurching from crisis to crisis, the economy gripped by stagnation, and the legitimacy of the state in constant question." The third, disastrous, possibility is the return of military dictatorship.

Another fate may await Nigeria: partition. Inkings of it are everywhere in *This House Has Fallen*. The multiple ethnic groups in the Niger Delta want control of their own resources. Muslims in the north want *sharia*. The Yoruba people, human rights activist Beko Ransome-Kuti declares, "simply need some space." With such enthusiasm for "ethnic sovereignty" being expressed by so many different groups, it is hard to believe that a strong, centralized democracy is widely desired. If Obasanjo can't make a united Nigeria worthwhile for Nigerians, he may soon find himself overseeing the breakup of a country he was elected to hold together. And the consequences of that are anybody's guess.

Instability is nothing new for Nigeria. "This house has fallen"—that's how novelist Chinua Achebe, an Igbo, described his homeland 17 years ago after a round of corrupt, rigged, and ultimately failed civilian elections. "This is an example of a country that has fallen down; it has collapsed."

If Nigeria collapsed in 1983, now it is buried. After so many years of military rule, Nigeria has been reduced to a pile of wormy boards and scrap metal, bare copper wire and dangerous stray nails, all covered with a thick layer of crude oil. Unless Obasanjo can build a new Nigeria on this unsteady foundation, his country is bound to remain in the sorry condition in which it now finds itself—a condition that one Nigerian columnist calls "democracy." ■

Hillary Frey is the managing editor of *Lingua Franca*.



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Muslims and Christians and the recent outbreaks of fighting over the proposed adoption of *sharia* in many states. In Zamfara, an incredibly poor state that borders Niger, he introduces us to Governor Sani, who oversaw the institution of Islamic law there earlier this year. Eager to appear a moderate democrat, Sani repeats "at least half a dozen times ... the refrain that *sharia* would only affect Muslims and would in no way prejudice Christians' way of life," Maier writes.

Yet in order to enforce *sharia*, Sani has set up what he calls the "Joint Aid Monitoring Group"—in effect, an organization of Muslim vigilantes. He also admits that one day *sharia* courts "may have to be applicable to everybody," meaning that a Christian convicted of theft—who is protected under a supposedly secular constitution—would, instead of going to prison for a few years, have his

president, is the nation's last hope. But this hardly means that Nigerians unanimously support his administration. Many Nigerians feel that Obasanjo is moving too slowly with promised reforms. Some had hoped for swift apprehension of those who violated human rights during military rule; others, especially in the oil-rich south, have demanded compensation for the destruction of their environment and use of local natural resources. "Nigerians from all walks of life are openly questioning whether their country should remain as one entity or discard the colonial borders and break apart into several separate states," Maier writes. "Ethnic and religious prejudices have found fertile ground in Nigeria, where there is neither a national consensus nor a binding ideology."

Maier suggests three possible directions for Nigeria's future, only one of which is truly progressive: successful reform,

Continued from page 30

already aware of—the ditches full of castrated corpses, the shreds of civilians hit by artillery, the round-the-clock rape of women in maternity wards—and drew them back to life in his chosen medium.

Given Sacco's subject, many reviewers will no doubt write that *Safe Area Gorazde* transcends its medium. They will say it approaches the comix Olympus occupied by Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. These reviewers will be at least partially right: Read purely as a comic book, *Safe Area Gorazde* is incredible. Sacco "writes" his pictures with the narrative strength of the medium at his command, arranging his panels to capture not a series of moments, but time and place itself. The slightly fish-eyed lens of Sacco's distorted yet realistic cartooning style captures the insanity and the intimacy forced by war, and it accentuates the fears that hide in the faces of his subjects.

But *Safe Area Gorazde* does not transcend the comic medium. It fulfills it. For years, a few intellectuals "in the know" have rightly argued that underground comix are among the most vital of the popular arts. They have often cited Sacco as proof of this. And so, Sacco's true achievement is transcending the journalistic form. By telling his story with pictures, Sacco makes his journalism art; but by drawing his pictures with a writer's eye, Sacco makes his journalism Art. It is not what Sacco says, but what he shows that makes his story merit re-reading.

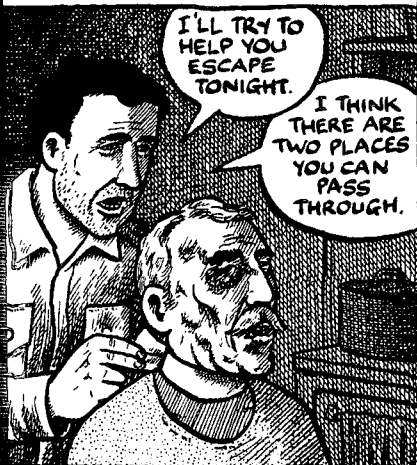
Haunting the dead center of Sacco's story is the chapter featuring a refugee from Visegrad named Rasim and his eyewitness account of Serb troops who massacred captive families on a bridge in the middle of the night, night after night. By day the soldiers rounded up more victims while drinking, playing the

accordion and singing songs in their spattered uniforms. Sacco waits until almost halfway through his book before depicting this "unsubstantiated" massacre because mere atrocity—man's inhumanity to man—is something that unfortunately no longer jars our society from its slumber. With the instinct of a novelist, Sacco knows that if we live with these people first, night and day as they soldier in their civilian way past the unspeakable horrors they have survived to the uncertainty that awaits them—then we will feel the full weight of their predicament. We have to really know these people before we can really care about them. That is all, essentially, that Sacco is asking us to do. He is not a propagandist. He simply wants us to fall in love with the people of Gorazde the same way he did: by hanging out with them.

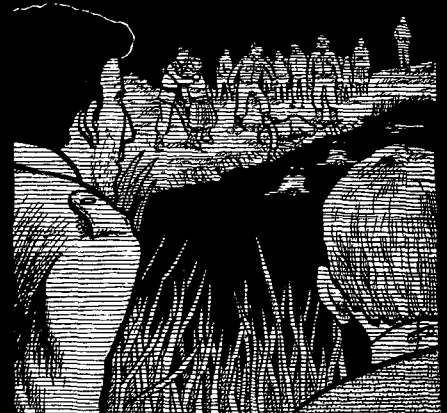
Continued on page 28



"At 11 p.m., the neighbor who saved me came to my house. He bandaged my throat."



"We tried those places, but we couldn't pass. We came directly where the Chetniks were bringing a lot of people and killing them. Mostly women and children."



"I returned home."



"At 5 a.m., I left to cross to the other side of the Drina."



"I met a Serb guy I'd known before the war. I told him where I was going."



"Mirko Lakic was a butcher before the war, and I was an eye-

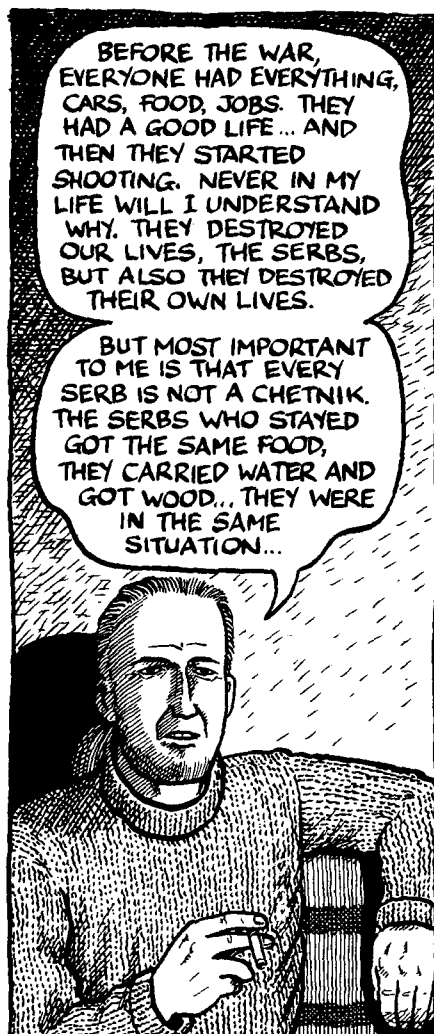


witness when some Chetniks took two guys from Lakic's car, and



Lakic cut their throats and pushed them in the river.

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Continued from page 26

Hanging out is perhaps the most moving part of this book. It is certainly the most fun. We drink a lot of little cups of coffee with our hosts, by the candlelight or by fire, swap a lot of gossip, and help our Muslim friend Riki learn English in the way he ardently wants—by figuring out the lyrics to “Dead Flowers” by the Rolling Stones. We dance with them, laugh with them and crash on their couch every night. Then, and only then, do the Chetniks show up to torch their homes and slit their throats. In the main, that is Sacco’s triumph: to make palpable and personal a war we have heard about a thousand times before but have never let hit home.

Because Sacco lived with his subjects, his book has a surprisingly quotidian focus on their day-to-day struggles. They chop wood, conjure from scratch the first pizza seen in years and build a generator to run teenage mutant movies on their VCR. They are simply fighting for the right to a normal life, and it is in this humble fight that their heroism is most apparent. A woman may be defeated, but she is not destroyed so long as she can escape to the shattered public library and read Baudelaire. A soldier cannot be hopeless while he still wonders whether or not Clyde Drexler was traded to the Houston Rockets. The picture of anticipation on a teen-ager’s

face as she watches Sacco bite into a square of her banana bread, baked just for him, says more about the fragility and resiliency of her human spirit than the proverbial thousand words. Consider that proverbial value, and consider the fact that there are thousands of pictures in this book, and you begin to get an inkling of its worth.

That is what I argued at the barbecue. Sitting there I felt a bit like one of the Gorazdans in Sacco’s book. I was not besieged, obviously, but there we neighbors were, huddled around the dying coals and telling stories, food in our guts, drinks in our hands. We were hanging out, just like Sacco and his friends. But the rest of our neighbors were not out there in the enclosing blackness, jeering at us from their hills. My mother had not been raped, and my father had not been shot. My neighbors were not promising to kill me. ■

Daniel K. Raeburn produces *The Imp*, a journal devoted to the comic genre. For more information on Joe Sacco, Gorazde and *Safe Area Gorazde*, visit the Fantagraphics Books Web site (<http://www.fantagraphics.com/preview/gorazde/gorazde.html>). *Safe Area Gorazde* is available at bookstores and comic book specialty shops nationwide, or can be ordered directly from the publisher at 1-800-657-1100.

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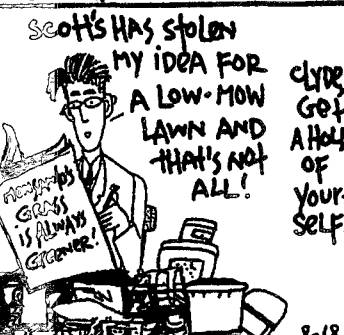
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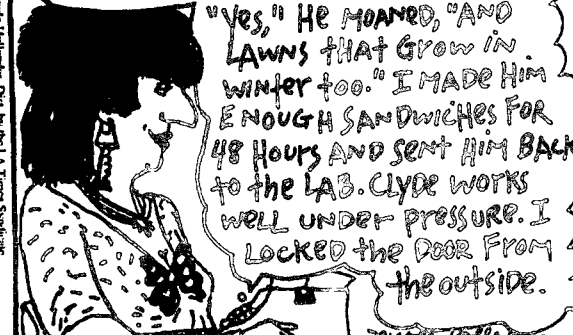
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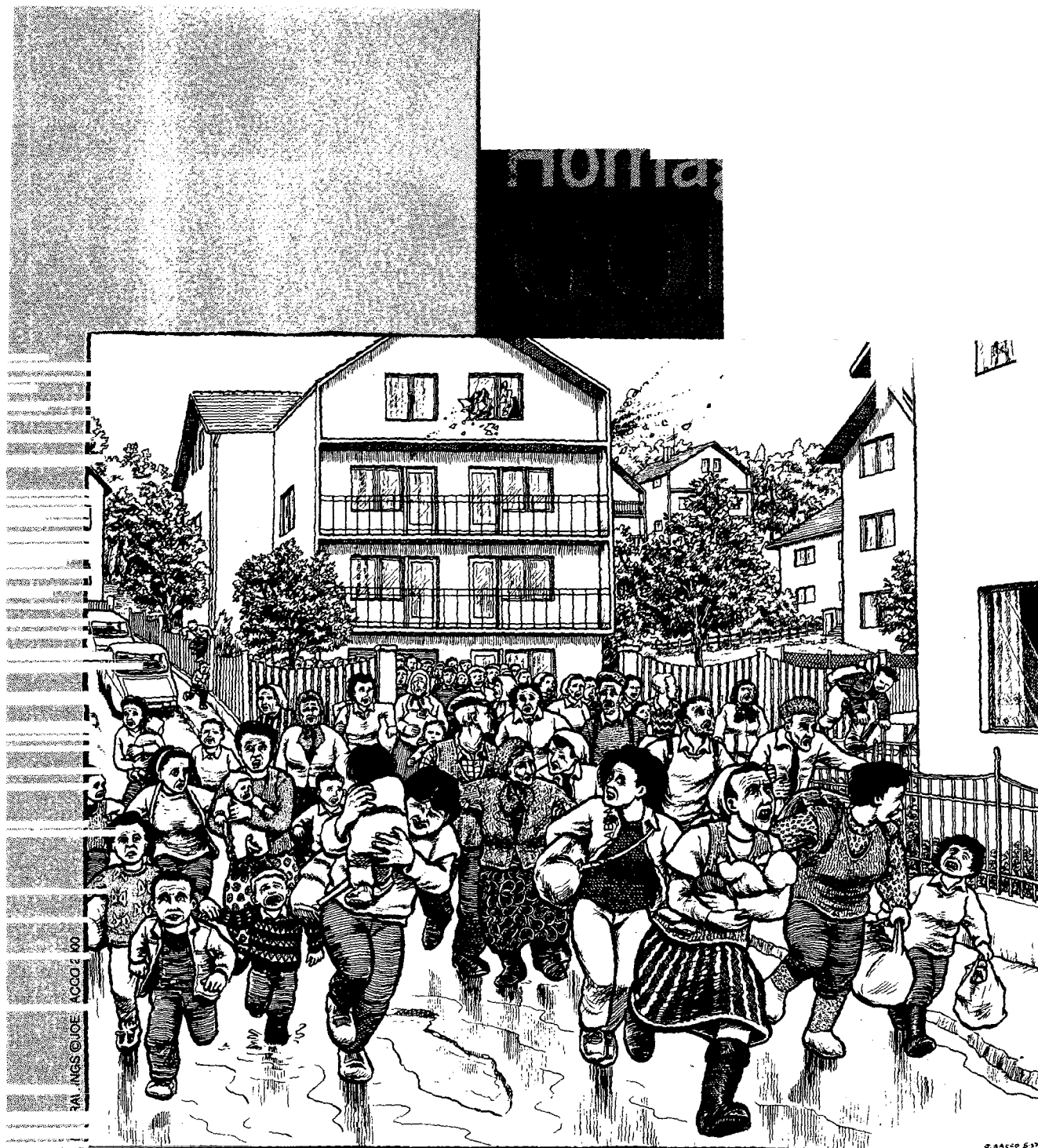
"Have they developed Grasses in Red, White AND BLUE FOR LUMINESCENT LAWNS?"



By Nicole Hollander

48 Hours Later...





By Daniel K. Raeburn

Recently I was at a backyard barbecue with my Chicago neighbors. Late at night the talk turned to books, as it often does, and I described a book that had haunted me for days. It was *Safe Area Gorazde*, Joe Sacco's account of life under siege in an east Bosnian outpost during the civil war. I recounted to my neighbors anecdote after anecdote from the book, trying to impress on them that they must read this book right now, that its 227 pages contained the truest, most loving and horrifying reporting yet written on the Bosnian tragedy. I told them Sacco was the Bosnian war's own Orwell, and *Safe Area Gorazde* was his *Homage to Catalonia*. After a polite silence, a neighbor interjected: "Let me get this straight: You're talking about a *comic book* with Chetniks in it?"

Yes. Like *Palestine*, Sacco's previous comic book (which won an American Book Award in 1996), *Safe Area Gorazde* is an extended, dead-serious, comic-journalistic essay on—what else can a war correspondent write about?—man's inhumanity to man. As the Bosnian war slowly and painfully segued to a bitter, drawn-out cease-fire (optimistically called "peace" by its architects back in the Buckeye State), Sacco wormed his way through the Serb armies encircling the rural, largely Muslim Bosnian enclave of Gorazde and lived there with its citizens. With a soldier and math teacher named Edin as his guide, Sacco exhumed the stories we are

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